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# INQUIRY

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## CONTENTS

### **First in College: A Qualitative Exploration of Experiences of First-Generation Students**

*Rebecca Evans, Don Stansberry, Kim E. Bullington, and Dana Burnett*

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate first-generation students' perceptions of how their lived experiences have impacted their academic and non-academic success. The authors utilized focus groups consisting of first-generation students who attended a rural community college and a large, public, metropolitan, research university, and compared their lived experiences. Their findings confirmed some past research that found that a lack of social capital, academic preparation, financial resources, and family support challenge this population of students in their transition to college. However, some of the results contradict past findings which have concluded that part-time enrollment increases the risk of first-generation student attrition. Most of the findings were consistent between the two groups of participants. Findings related to awareness of the availability of support services differed between the two samples.

### **Reducing Stereotype Threat in the Classroom**

*Todd K. Platts and Kim Hoosier*

This brief pedagogical essay, focusing on social science classrooms, provides fellow instructors with practical strategies and advice in reducing the presence of stereotype threat in their classrooms. Techniques of task reframing, practices of positive affirmation, the providing of constructive criticism, the incorporation of marginalized groups into course content, and suggestions for meeting stereotype threat head-on are discussed as are some strategies students can adopt themselves. While the methods of stereotype threat reduction addressed in this essay can help curtail some of the negative impacts of racism's micro-level forces, stereotype threat must also be considered a structural problem that requires structural solutions.

### **Teaching the Syllabus at the Community College**

*Yuemin He, Ph.D.*

Reacting directly to the fact that even the best syllabus is worthless to the student who does not read it, this essay draws inspiration from research of the past decade, especially from the learning-focused syllabus concept that was introduced by three researchers at the University of Virginia, and uses a questionnaire to gauge our community college students' needs. It suggests specific methods to build the bridge between course content instruction and syllabus teaching. Ultimately, it contributes to the discussion of several important syllabus-related questions: How can instructors use the syllabus as a pedagogical tool to build a strong student rapport? How can instructors balance the syllabus to build a positive academic atmosphere and fulfill course requirements? What are the ways to make the syllabus exemplary for student learning? What standard practices can be established in college syllabus education? The essay aims to increase student autonomy and community and student success, which is the goal of community college education.

### **Do the Verb. Become the Noun: Writing Towards a New Identity**

*Mary Tedrow*

The initial composition course in the community college has the potential to be a transformative space for the identity formation of adult learners towards the linguistic signifier of scholar. Freshman students of variable ages enter a new culture which demands the negotiation of an alternative academic language, an adaptation to the post-secondary culture, and the development of the critical thinking required for academic work. All of these factors can destabilize identity as students confront long-held beliefs and biases in their studies. Students who are unable to adapt to the new environment are likely to leave without realizing personal goals. Adjusting pedagogy to support students through a transformative stage will increase student success. In this study, freshman composition students reflect on their identities as writers in both pre and post treatment writings. Post treatment reflections revealed a shift in linguistic identity markers, with 85% of students exhibiting language supporting an increased sense of agency and control over their written products and a rising confidence in their sense of self as a writer. This increase in confidence and control indicates that thoughtfully applied pedagogy can shift student identity to that which supports successful post-secondary learning.

### **Notes in Brief**

#### **Mathematics Corequisite Remediation and Direct Enrollment: Addressing Misconceptions and Concerns**

*Zachary Beamer, Ed.D.*

In Fall 2020, the VCCS will begin implementing the Direct Enrollment Pilot, building upon lessons learned in prior reforms and successes of reforms in other states. In the new corequisite model of developmental education, students at the margins of college preparation are placed directly into college coursework with a supplemental support class. This Notes in Brief article summarizes some of the research behind the transition towards this model and the implications of this scholarship on current reform efforts. It directly addresses concerns regarding the move towards corequisite instruction and provides recommendations for how to implement reforms.

### **Book Review**

#### **Review of Flower Darby and James M. Lang's *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes***

*Christian Aguiar*

In their 2019 book *Small Teaching Online*, Flower Darby and James M. Lang present a model for online instruction that uses the small teaching approach, which argues that college faculty should look for small, high-impact changes they can make to their teaching practice, not wholesale overhauls. They explore the unique challenges that online learners struggle with, from feeling disengaged to being overwhelmed by the demands of self-directed learning, then offer practical, sustainable solutions for each. Their text thus offers helpful teaching practices both for new online teachers and veterans.

## **NEW HORIZONS SHOWCASE**

### **Problem-Based Learning: Connecting Sociocultural Theory with Service Learning and Reflection**

*Lauren Foster*

This presentation focuses on the aspects of problem-based learning within writing courses and the interconnectedness to sociocultural theory and its impacts on service learning and reflection. This presentation highlights service learning as an interactive learning tool for students to incorporate problem based learning and introduces reflection as a means of assessment. Through reflection of service learning students can understand the validity of sociocultural impacts within the world around them to help better prepare them to problem solve through writing applications. The goal then is to actively engage students on larger scale by introducing real-world problems and introducing cultural impacts.

### **Meeting Students Where They Are**

*Matthew Seth Helmandollar*

As a success coach, it can be challenging in identifying and referring students to the resources that can aid, and that can assist with each student's success during their first year. It is vital to use modern technological resources that are available at no additional cost to institutions, and which students are currently using, to aid in consistency within the field of academic advising and coaching as it pertains to a student's first year. It engages students to reach out to faculty mentors to provide a "holistic" approach to the student's success on the campus and meets students where they are via their learning management system. Included is information and feedback obtained through the National Academic Advising Association's summer institute faculty regarding the usage of technological resources to provide a successful student experience. An overview of the creation and implementation of Canvas to perform the institutions' advising objectives to create consistency in advising and coaching across campuses, especially in a time in which technology is a requirement as a result of the 2020 SARS-CoV-19 viral pandemic that ceased main campus and offsite campus operations for the remainder of the academic year with potential impacts to the proceeding academic year going forward.

### **Preparing Students for Digital Era Careers**

*Melissa Stange, Ph.D.*

This paper discusses why technical skills alone will not be enough for students to have successful careers in the digital age. Much of their success will hinge on critical soft skills, such as adaptability, inner strength, holistic thinking, and a collaborative spirit. Examples will be provided for inclusion with a computer science program, but in a way that is easily adaptable to other disciplines.